

CALIFORNIA

OCCUPATIONAL GUIDES

EMBALMERS

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INTEREST AREA
REALISTIC



WHAT DOES AN EMBALMER DO?

One of the oldest known professions is EMBALMERS, the person who prepares the deceased for burial. Early embalming dates back to Egyptian mummies around 3,000 years B.C. In those days, usually only the bodies of the wealthy were embalmed because of the expense and time involved. Embalming today is a sanitary, cosmetic, and preservative process through which the body is disinfected, preserved (temporarily), and prepared for interment. Modern Embalmers must follow State and federal laws of health and sanitation that help to prevent the spread of contagious diseases. Because embalming is only a small part of the burial process, Embalmers may perform many other functions in the

funeral home, including that of Funeral Director, who arranges details for and directs funeral services.

When the body of the deceased is received at the funeral home, it is placed on a stainless steel or porcelain worktable, and clothes, jewelry, glasses, and other items are removed. The Embalmer first washes the body with a germicidal soap or disinfectant spray. The Embalmer closes the eyes and mouth arranging the facial appearance as necessary and then positions the rest of the body in a resting position.

The actual embalming process starts with two small incisions made, usually in the neck, arm, or thigh. This allows the Embalmer to insert the preservative fluid into the circulatory system with the use of an injection machine. This forces the blood out the other incision into which a drainage tube has been placed. This preservative fluid may contain a dye to give the skin a particular color or appearance. Another incision is then made near the navel area to remove fluid and waste matter from the abdomen and chest cavities and organs using a suction device. The Embalmer then inserts the preservative fluid and sutures all the incisions closed.

Embalmers may pack body cavities, reshape or reconstruct features using materials such as cotton, plaster of paris, or wax, and apply cosmetics, lotions, or other materials to give the desired appearance. This is especially true when the body has been injured or suffered from disease. Finally, the Embalmer will dress the body and place it in the selected casket.

While specific job duties vary depending upon the management and size of the funeral home, Embalmers perform the following tasks:

- Apply cosmetics to impart lifelike appearance to the deceased.
- Attach trocar to pump-tube, start pump, and repeat probing to force embalming fluid into organs.



- Close incisions, using needles and sutures.
- Conform to laws of health and sanitation, and ensure that legal requirements concerning embalming are met.
- Join lips, using needles and thread or wire.
- Make incisions in arms or thighs and drain blood from circulatory system and replace it with embalming fluid, using pump.
- Pack body orifices with cotton saturated with embalming fluid to prevent escape of gases or waste matter.
- Dress bodies and place them in caskets.
- Incise stomach and abdominal walls and probe internal organs, using trocar, to withdraw blood and waste matter from organs.
- Insert convex celluloid or cotton between eyeballs and eyelids to prevent slipping and sinking of eyelids.

WHAT SKILLS ARE IMPORTANT

Important skills, knowledge, and abilities for Embalmers include:

- **Finger Dexterity** – The ability to make precisely coordinated movements of the fingers of one or both hands to grasp, manipulate, or assemble very small objects.
- **Arm-Hand Steadiness** – The ability to keep your hand and arm steady while moving your arm or while holding your arm and hand in one position.
- **Near Vision** – The ability to see details of objects at a close range (within a few feet of the observer).
- **Biology** – Knowledge of plant and animal organisms, their tissues, cells, functions, interdependencies, and interactions with each other and the environment.
- **Chemistry** – Knowledge of the chemical composition, structure, and properties of substances and of the chemical processes and transformations that they undergo. This includes uses of chemicals and their interactions, danger signs, production techniques, and disposal methods.
- **Equipment Selection** – Determining the kind of tools and equipment needed to do a job.

- **Monitoring** – Monitoring/Assessing performance of yourself, other individuals, or organizations to make improvements or take corrective action.
- **Time Management** – Managing one's own time and the time of others.
- **Active Listening** – Giving full attention to what other people are saying, taking time to understand the points being made, asking questions as appropriate, and not interrupting at inappropriate times.
- **Judgment and Decision Making** – Considering the relative costs and benefits of potential actions to choose the most appropriate one.
- **Writing** – Communicating effectively in writing as appropriate for the needs of the audience.

WHAT'S THE WORK ENVIRONMENT?

Nearly all Embalmers are employed in funeral homes (mortuaries), and many of them also perform the functions of the Funeral Director. Embalmers may need to be experienced in all aspects of funeral home operation, including a variety of administrative functions, especially the ability to work well with grieving clients. Embalmers work mainly indoors in laboratory settings that are kept cool, well lighted, well ventilated, and clinically clean. Embalmers are usually responsible for maintaining the equipment they use and the rooms they work in. Those who are self-employed and work in several funeral homes usually must supply their own lab coat, gloves, and masks. Health hazards are minimal due to the strict sanitary standards they are required to meet. Embalmers must also be able to lift both bodies and caskets with the help of hoists or other workers. A small number of Embalmers work in city or county morgues or hospitals.

Union Membership

The California Funeral Director's Association (CFDA) and the California State Cemetery and Funeral Bureau reports that unions do not represent Embalmers in California.

WHAT'S THE CALIFORNIA JOB OUTLOOK?

According to the Occupational Employment Statistics survey, there were 530 Embalmers

holding jobs in California in 2003. The Cemetery and Funeral Bureau reports that as of December 2004 California has 2,707 Licensed Embalmers and 431 registered Apprentice Embalmers.

Trends

While the last quarter century saw a trend toward corporate-owned funeral homes, the trend has begun to reverse, according to the Cemetery and Funeral Bureau. Most funeral establishments remain small, family-run businesses, and many Embalmers are either owner-operators or employed by the business. Cremation is increasing in popularity in many regions such as San Francisco, which negatively affects the need for Embalmers. However, some regions such as the Central Valley show a high demand for Embalmers due to personal faiths and philosophies.

WHAT DOES THE JOB PAY?

California Earnings

The following information is from the Occupational Employment Statistics Survey of Employers by EDD/LMID:

Embalmers 2005 Wages

Hourly wages range from	\$15.17	to	\$21.38
Average hourly wage	\$18.47		
Average annual wage	\$38,424		

These figures do not include self-employment.

Hours

In small funeral homes the work hours may be irregular, but in larger ones employees usually work eight hours a day, five or six days a week. Many work on an on-call basis due to the need for 24-hour availability. Some Embalmers may work part time or on-call in several funeral homes in an area in order to work full time on a regular basis. Shift work is sometimes required due to evening and weekend work schedules.

Benefits

A recent CFDA survey found 92 percent of employers offer medical insurance, 65 percent offer retirement, 35 percent offer profit sharing,

and 18 percent offer on-site housing. Some employers offer vacation and disability insurance as well. Embalmers who work for corporations almost always receive full benefits.

HOW DO I PREPARE FOR THE JOB?

Education and Training

The Cemetery and Funeral Bureau of the California Department of Consumer Affairs requires that Embalmers complete at least one year of academic courses in a school accredited by the American Board of Funeral Service Education. Typical courses include:

- Restorative Art I
- Embalming I
- Embalming II
- Embalming Anatomy & Pathology I
- Funeral Service Thanatology I
- Funeral Service Management I
- Funeral Directing I (3)
- Funeral Directing II
- Merchandising
- Funeral Service Management
- Funeral Service Law and Ethics
- Funeral Service Counseling
- Funeral Service Internship

College prerequisites include Biology or Chemistry and English or English as a second language. High school students interested in this career field should take science classes in biology, physiology, and chemistry.

Licensing and Certification

The Cemetery and Funeral Bureau of the California Department of Consumer Affairs licenses Embalmers and requires that licensees

- Be at least 18 years old.
- Be a high school graduate or have practiced in another state or country for at least three of the last seven years without a license suspension or revocation for unethical conduct.

- Have committed no acts or crimes constituting grounds for denial of licensure.
- Have successfully completed one academic year in an embalming school approved by the Cemetery and Funeral Bureau and accredited by the American Board of Funeral Service Education.
- Have completed two years of apprenticeship in a licensed California funeral establishment under the supervision of a licensed Embalmer and have assisted in embalming 100 human remains. The establishment must have been approved for the apprentice training by the Cemetery and Funeral Bureau, and the supervising Embalmer must have had two years of practical experience as a California-licensed Embalmer.
- Pass criminal record (fingerprint) clearance, unless already completed.
- Submit application form and filing fee.
- Pass the Embalmer examination administered by the Cemetery and Funeral Bureau.

Continuing Education

Embalmers currently have no continuing education requirements.

HOW DO I FIND THE JOB?

Many Embalmers go to work for the employers that provided their workplace apprenticeship prior to their licensing. Some mortuary science schools have placement services that have contacts with funeral homes. Direct application to employers from word-of-mouth contacts within the industry remains the most effective job search method. The California Funeral Director's Association also provides members with a resume referral service. Search these **yellow page** headings for listings of private firms:

- Funeral Directors
- Funeral Information
- Funeral Supplies and Services
- Internet Guide blue pages

The following Internet resources can be helpful to the job search process:

America's Career InfoNet
www.acinet.org

America's Job Bank
www.ajb.dni.us

CalJOBSSM
www.caljobs.ca.gov

Job Search and Resume Writing
www.worksmart.ca.gov/success_tips_menu.html

Local Job Service Offices
www.edd.ca.gov/jsrep/jsloc.htm

Occupational Information Network (O*NET) Online
<http://online.onetcenter.org>

One-Stop Career Centers List
www.edd.ca.gov/ONE-STOP/pic.htm

For statewide and local projections, wages, employers by county, and other occupational information go to www.labormarketinfo.edd.ca.gov and select *Find an Occupation Profile*.

WHERE CAN THIS JOB LEAD?

Many Embalmers become funeral directors where they work and can become managers of the larger funeral homes. Other Embalmers with experience and/or education may go on to work as city or county coroners.

OTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

California Department of Consumer Affairs
 Cemetery and Funeral Bureau
 400 R Street, Suite 3080
 Sacramento, CA 95814
 (916) 322-7737
www.dca.ca.gov/cemetery

California Funeral Director's Association
 One Capitol Mall, Suite 320
 Sacramento, CA 95814
 (800) 255-2332
www.cafda.org

Cypress College
 Mortuary Science Department
 9200 Valley View Street
 Cypress, CA 90630-5897
 (714) 484-7270
www.healthscience.cypresscollege.edu/~mortsci

American River College
 Funeral Service Education Program
 4700 College Oak Drive
 Sacramento, CA 95841
 (916) 484-8254
www.arc.losrios.edu/~edhealth/FSE.html

CA Division of Apprenticeship Standards
 For the closest district office, visit
www.dir.ca.gov/DAS/das.html

RELATED OCCUPATIONAL GUIDES

Laboratory Assistants and Technicians (Except health)	No. 201
Surgical Technicians	No. 462

OCCUPATIONAL CODE REFERENCES

SOC (*Standard Occupational Classification*)

Funeral Directors	11-9061
Surgical Technologists	29-2055
Embalmers	39-4011

O*NET (*Occupational Information Network*)

Embalmers	39-4011.00
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OES (*Occupational Employment Statistics*)

Embalmers	39014
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